

Fairfax Center Phase II Working Group

Meeting Minutes

September 29, 2015

Attendance

Working Group: Jackie Bradley, Sherry Fisher, Chris Grisafe, Jim Katcham, Jeff Parnes, Vincent Picciano, Roni Robins, Robbie Stark, Tony Wiley, Sandria Lherisse, Mark McConn

Staff: Kim Rybold (DPZ), Ken Sorenson (DPZ), Kristin Calkins (FCDOT), Rosemary Ryan (Supervisor Cook's office – Braddock District)

Introduction

Jim Katcham, Chairman of the Fairfax Center Area Phase II Working Group, called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm. He referenced the minutes that were distributed to the Working Group prior to the meeting and asked if there were any comments or corrections. Vince Picciano made a motion to approve the minutes, and Jim Katcham seconded the motion. The Working Group approved the minutes 7-0 (Tony Wiley, Jeff Parnes, Chris Grisafe, and Sandria Lherisse not yet present).

Presentation of and discussion on Submission Areawide (AW)12

Kim Rybold noted that Submission AW 12 is located on page 47 of the submission compilation distributed at the September 3, 2015 meeting. She then introduced Kristin Calkins, Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT), who would provide some additional information on funding for pedestrian improvements and present Submission AW12.

Kristin Calkins began by saying that for bicycle and pedestrian-related transportation improvements such as these to be funded they first have to be planned. Roni Robins asked if there are any such planned improvements within the Fairfax Center Area. Kim Rybold noted that there is not a specific pedestrian plan for the Fairfax Center Area; however, there is a Bicycle Master Plan that covers the whole county and makes recommendations within this area. Roni Robins commented that putting sidewalks against a highway is not pedestrian friendly, and the area needs good pedestrian design. Kristin Calkins responded that sidewalk standards have changed, and in the future, a three-foot sidewalk abutting the side of the road would not be constructed. Standards vary from five to ten feet.

Staff was asked to provide the group with the county's trails plan for the Fairfax Center Area. Tony Wiley commented that since FCDOT focuses on roads and the Park Authority focuses on trails in its parks, the concept of connecting existing neighborhoods to one another falls through the cracks.

Rosemary Ryan noted that the county has a nonmotorized transportation committee. They meet every month and look at trail segments and places can be connected. She noted that this information is available on the county's website. Kim Rybold stated she would send this link, along with that of the Trails Plan, to the group.

Kristin Calkins began her presentation of Submission AW 12. She described the submission, which states that a study of interchanges planned along the Lee Highway corridor should be undertaken. There are multiple reasons for this, one being that interchanges are expensive and take up a lot of right-of-way. When development applications are reviewed, applicants are asked to provide a wide right-of-way based on these recommendations. Staff wants to study if these are needed improvements or if other mitigation measures would work. The planned interchanges are at Waples Mill Road, Legato Road, and Monument Drive. Kim Rybold noted that this corridor is along the edge of the Suburban Center, but not in the core.

Roni Robins asked if the study would include an assessment of the need for service drives along some commercial areas. These areas might be an opportunity to create a nice streetscape with pedestrian features. Kristin Calkins responded that the study has not been scoped. Staff would have to include the existing service roads to see how the road currently functions and how it could be changed in the future.

Jeff Parnes stated that the Fairfax County Parkway / Route 29 interchange allows traffic on both roads to go unimpeded. Is that the same configuration that is planned at the other interchanges? Kristin Calkins noted that this may be an aggressive interchange alternative for some of the intersections. Jeff Parnes noted that the plan 20 years ago was to extend that type of interchange further along the corridor. Kim Rybold stated that the challenge is trying to preserve right-of-way but not knowing what the design is. What this study seeks to find is if this type of design is still appropriate.

Robbie Stark noted that to take away planned road capacity would make no sense. There is not going to be less traffic in 20 years, no matter how many pedestrian facilities or bike paths are built. Kristin Calkins added that there are ways to move people without the engineering standards of the 1990s creating barriers among neighborhoods. This is the intent of the study.

Tony Wiley expressed concern that these are the right intersections to study. The Stringfellow Road/Lee Highway interchange is very congested. Kristin Calkins noted that when the study is scoped it is likely that staff would look at this portion of the corridor as well.

Both Chris Grisafe and Roni Robins noted that it would be helpful to see some of these planned transportation improvements overlaid on a map. Staff noted that they can look into pulling this information into a GIS map that could be displayed at future meetings.

Robbie Stark asked to clarify the level of detail the Working Group was tasked with. He did not think the group was going to start making specific recommendations for facilities like bike lanes. Kim Rybold stated that he is correct, the group is generally focusing more on high-level recommendations. FCDOT submitted this idea because this corridor is a critical piece of the area. This will have to go through a detailed study that is coordinated with VDOT.

Tony Wiley stated that he wants to make sure recommendations go beyond merely stating that there needs to be better pedestrian access. Roni Robins suggested that looking at existing conditions and plans helps formulate those types of guidelines.

Vincent Picciano noted that Lee Highway is a commuter road, and is not pedestrian friendly. With the planned interchanges, it will be a high-speed commuter road. There is not enough density along Lee Highway to create a walkable environment. Tony Wiley added that there is a grocery store a mile from his house, but he can't get there without a car because the only way is down Lee Highway and it is not pedestrian friendly.

Follow-up discussion about core

Kim Rybold passed out two maps. The first illustrated the age of buildings within the Suburban Center, and the second map shows areas that could be examined for land use changes based upon building age, land use, and previous Working Group discussions. It pulls in retail uses from the 1990s and earlier, apartment buildings from the 1980s within ½ mile of transit stations, and older office buildings (from 1980s and 1990s) with surface parking. Parks and public facilities are noted on the map. Green-dashed lines indicate areas with existing Plan options that have not yet been implemented.

At the last meeting the group discussed the overall Concept for Future Development for the Suburban Center. There was not agreement on Sub-unit J1 (Fairfax Towne Center), the area around the Stringfellow Road Park and Ride, and the Fair Lakes area. The group revisited these areas.

The group started with the core area, where there was generally consensus achieved at the last meeting. Chris Grisafe asked if the area south of I-66 (Sub-unit O6) would be included. Kim Rybold clarified that these are the apartments to the west of Legato Road, which fall in the half mile radius of the transit station.

Vincent Picciano asked if staff knew where the Metro station would be located. Staff responded that it would be generally across from the parking lot to the west of Fairfax Corner.

Mark McConn asked if this takes into account the expansion of I-66. Kim Rybold noted that unlike other parts of I-66, the right-of-way impacts in this area are expected to be minimal.

Roni Robins asked about the planned densities at other metro stations in the county. Kim Rybold responded that in the Huntington TSA, the maximum is a 3.0 FAR. Tysons is a bit unique in that it does not have a cap of FAR for within a quarter mile of transit. Both Vienna and Dunn Loring have planned intensities generally in the 1.0 to 2.25 FAR range. The area on the north side of I-66 from Dunn Loring is generally planned for single-family residential uses.

Kristen Calkins noted that planned intensity in Reston generally ranges from 1.5 to 3.0 FAR, and Roni Robins added that the Town Center TSA is planned for intensity of up to 4.0 FAR.

In response to Sub-unit J1, Robbie Stark thought it should stay in the core. Kim Rybold noted that there is currently language about it being a transition area, despite being in the core. Since there is a separate Plan amendment currently being reviewed on this property, staff will provide the working group additional information as it will inform their discussion.

Jeff Parnes noted that if the Plan amendment impacts the people who live to the west, the group must be careful that we don't overshadow the existing residents. Kim Rybold noted that there has been outreach as part of the Plan amendment, and there will be additional outreach during the study process.

Roni Robins stated that at the last meeting the group talked about dual cores and how they may serve different purposes. She suggested that walkability be considered in defining the core, and that areas beyond ½ mile should not be included. Kim Rybold said that since there is a current Plan amendment in Sub-unit J1, perhaps we at least want to consider it within the discussion of the core. The group can define if this stays in the core after looking at it more comprehensively.

For the area around Sub-unit O6, Sherry Fisher commented that if it is safe, and there is good access, people will walk more than ¼ to ½ mile to get to a transit station. This was acknowledged by staff, but the ¼ and ½ mile measurements are based on the county's Transit Oriented Development policy.

Jeff Parnes asked how much of the Government Center land is planned for future development. Kim Rybold stated that she didn't know offhand, but the area was limited to a .35 FAR overall. Rosemary Ryan noted that a lot of the intensity was taken up when the public safety building was approved. The Residents at Government Center is also taking some of that intensity. As a result, the Government Center cannot expand much given the overall FAR for the site.

The discussion moved on to the area by the Stringfellow Road Park and Ride, and how that should be considered. Jeff Parnes asked in the county, what other planned transit stop is as low density as this? If this is going to be a transit station, the area should have a plan for higher density. If there is no plan for that, it hurts the county in the long-term. Kim Rybold noted that there is not a lot of density around the West Falls Church station, with several single-family homes nearby. Jeff responded that West Falls Church also has institutional/government uses around it. His concern is this is all residential and has not been planned for denser development.

Kim Rybold noted that a transportation study done in the 2000s identified the location of this station. She said she would see if she could find the link and send it to the group. Given the existing development patterns, it might be difficult to consider this area as constituting a core.

Roni Robins asked if this station could serve a different purpose than the one by Fair Oaks. Perhaps it would be more commuter-oriented.

Jeff Parnes thought this could be the case if it was something like at the Wiehle station. The parking could be underground and the land could be used for development. If we don't plan for it now, we will lose the opportunity. Thirty years ago the county did not, and we should not make that mistake again.

Roni Robins asked if the group could make a more general recommendation that at some time in the future a study be done. Jeff Parnes said that it should be worded so that when transit comes, an overlay recommendation would go into effect. Too much piecemeal planning has been done. At Fair

Oaks, the Plan provides the opportunity for more development when transit comes. We need to do the same here. Roni Robins responded that she was not sure what this means and what we should do about it. She said she can conceive of a station at Fair Oaks, but is having a hard time understanding higher density at Stringfellow.

Jeff Parnes noted that Fair Oaks will be the first stop west of Vienna, and the next is Stringfellow. Jim Katcham agreed that if there is no plan now, the opportunity may be gone in 30 years. Jeff Parnes clarified that he wasn't saying Stringfellow is a core, but it should be seen as a transit center.

Chris Grisafe asked a question about where the second core is. Kim Rybold clarified that currently there is only one core defined, but the question of whether Fair Lakes was a core was raised at the last meeting. She noted that generally speaking, what defines a core is that it is where where higher intensity uses are planned. The Fair Lakes area is a sizable area with a pending Plan amendment. Staff is awaiting additional information from one of the property owners on the exact nature of what is proposed.

Jeff Parnes asked a question to clarify why one office building just south of Greenbriar was highlighted and not the one adjacent to it. Kim Rybold noted that staff highlighted properties where there was either land or surface parking available.

Kim Rybold stated that at the meeting it was suggested that perhaps Fair Lakes is a core. Does the group think this is the case?

Roni Robins stated the group keeps referring to the idea of cores, but perhaps there is other terminology. Robbie Stark agreed that Fair Lakes was not a core like the area around Fair Oaks Mall. Jim Katcham asked if others agreed. No one disagreed.

Based on this, Kim Rybold said that the group's initial focus will be on the core area that was defined earlier. At the next meeting, the group can better define it and look into some of the proposed land use changes.

Chris Grisafe suggested that different terminology may be appropriate for these areas, instead of using the word core. Kim Rybold said that the word core is what is used in other suburban centers throughout the county, but the group can think about the terminology as the study progresses.

Areawide Guiding Principles

Kim Rybold passed out a Draft Vision and Guiding Principles based on the previous meeting's discussion. She read through the "Guiding Planning Principles."

Tony Wiley noted that walkability should be its own principle in addition to being considered with transit.

Jeff Parnes, regarding Principle 3, asked if the group really wanted “urban design.” This is a suburban area. Roni Robins responded that it is a planning term, and does not mean that the group is trying to emulate the design of a place like New York City.

Tony Wiley said that the group needs to be careful of connecting ideas together. Some activity modes may be just residential or commercial.

Jeff Parnes, regarding Principle 4 asked what is meant by a “balanced” mix. How do you define balance? Kim Rybold said that we can look at revising this principle to more accurately portray the group’s thoughts.

Tony Wiley, regarding principle 5, asked if sidewalks are really “facilities?” Kristin Calkins replied that this is the case.

Regarding Principle 8, Jeff Parnes suggested it should read “plan for” or “promote” because we cannot “ensure.” Tony Wiley suggested that the word “active” be deleted as well.

Tony Wiley suggested that regarding principle 9 the word “maintain” should be deleted. We should say “promote” the health of stream valleys.

Regarding Principle 10, Jeff Parnes suggested that “resources” should be listed first. You don’t get flexibility without having the resources necessary. Tony Wiley asked what the purpose of this principle is. Kim Rybold responded that it reflects some of the comments related to the implementation elements of the plan. The principle refers to the fact that developers offer proffers, so it may not be the county providing the resources. The language is trying not to get into implementation specifics.

Jeff Parnes suggested that principle 10 be moved to the end, as it is the culmination of everything else.

Chris Grisafe asked what “accountability” meant. Kim Rybold stated that there is a level of accountability in the review of proposed development, to ensure that developers are following the vision. This all ties back to how the plan is implemented. We will revisit this more when we review the area’s implementation strategy.

Tony Wiley suggested that an explanation for what each principle means would be helpful. Roni Robins added that examples might help the group visualize the intent of these principles.

Tony Wiley suggested that for principle 11, “low density” should be removed since some areas have slightly higher density but should also be preserved and protected.

Kim Rybold stated that we can revisit these at the next meeting. She asked the group to read through the draft guiding planning principles and provided comments to staff. These principles were derived by looking at the last meeting’s minutes and the post-it notes.

Tony Wiley suggested that as the group edits, to add an explanation so other members know what one is thinking. This is a good draft though given that staff pulled this from post-it notes.

Kim Rybold agreed that it is a starting point. She noted that nowhere in the Fairfax Center Area plan is a vision clearly stated. It is important to have an aspirational vision going forward.

Next Meeting

Jeff Parnes will create a Doodle poll to determine the next meeting date. Kim Rybold stated that it would likely be early November, after Election Day. Staff will invite people to come explain their submissions within the core area.

Jim Katcham adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.